

U.S. Northern Command Debuts

Story by Jim Garamone

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THE Department of Defense has announced what it calls the most sweeping changes in the Unified Command Plan since the system was established in 1946.

Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld and Air Force Gen. Richard Myers, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, said the plan realigns and streamlines U.S. military structure to better address 21st-century threats. And, for the first time, commanders' areas of operations will cover the entire Earth.

The biggest change in the plan is the creation of U.S. Northern Command, which will stand up Oct. 1, 2002, at Peterson Air Force Base, Colo. The NORTHCOM commander will be responsible for homeland defense and will head the joint U.S.-Canada North American Aerospace Defense Command.

Both Rumsfeld and Myers emphasized that DOD's most important mission is to defend the U.S. homeland.

"The changes made to the Unified Command Plan will help us to defend, to transform and to help us stand solidly with our friends and allies across the globe," Rumsfeld said.

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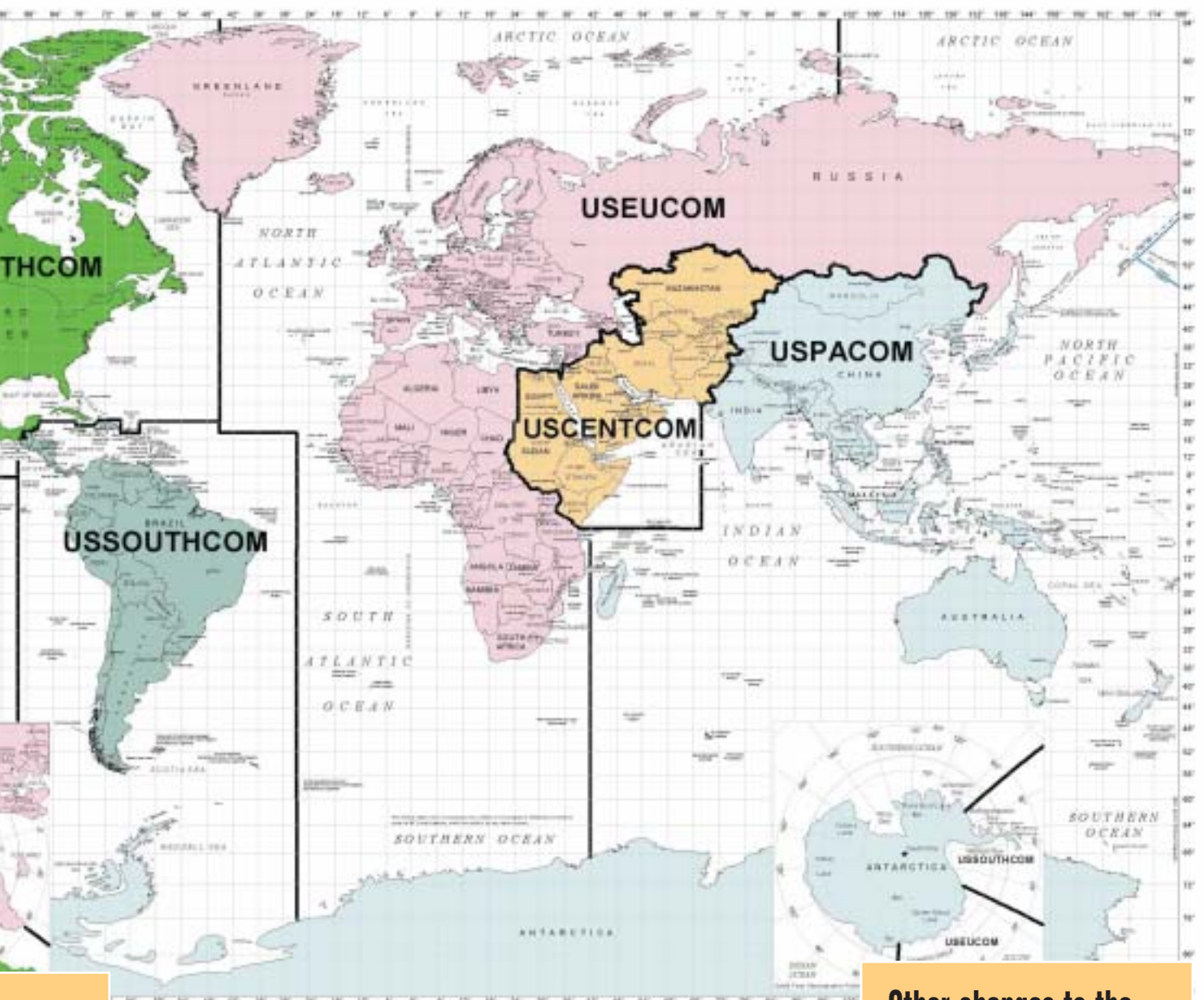
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The NORTHCOM commander will be responsible for homeland defense and will head the joint U.S.-Canada North American Aerospace Defense Command.

NORTHCOM's operational area will include the United States, Canada, Mexico, parts of the Caribbean and the contiguous waters of the Atlantic and Pacific oceans. The new command will support civilian authorities in response to contingencies that include natural disasters, and it will have responsibility for defending U.S. airspace and coastlines, Rumsfeld said.

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U.S. European Command will increase its area of responsibility to include the border of the Atlantic and the U.S. East Coast to the west of Europe, and it will have primary responsibility for the region. This change allows for closer cooperation and coordination between the U.S. and European militaries and more signal that the Cold War relationship is improving," Myers said.



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U.S. Pacific Command will help European Command with the far-eastern part of Russia and will add Antarctica to its area of responsibility.

Myers said the missions and areas of responsibility of **U.S. Central Command, U.S. Southern Command, and Space, Transportation, Strategic, and Special Operations commands** will not change right now. "We are, however, looking to the possible merger of Space Command and Strategic Command, and a study of that is under way," he said.

Other changes to the Unified Command Plan:

U.S. Joint Forces Command will be freed of its homeland-defense mission to focus on its role as a "force generator," with the immediate task of transforming the U.S. military. The current commander's dual-task as NATO's supreme allied commander, Atlantic, will be split off, and U.S. officials will consult with NATO allies to devise a plan for restructuring the NATO command. □